TWO LOGICS OF COLLECTIVE ACTION: THEORETICAL NOTES ON SOCIAL CLASS AND ORGANIZATIONAL FORM—*

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1. INTRODUCTION

2 plus 2 equals 4; person X and person Y have equal access to higher education. It is not just playing on words if we start with the observation that the relationship of "equality" is both a logical and a sociological one. Moreover, the two dimensions of the term equality are connected in an interesting way. Sociological measurements of social equality/inequality of income, wealth, power, prestige, etc., provide us with information only to the extent that they indicate the distance or approximation of a given
social reality to a normative ideal of equality. Knowing something about actual patterns of distribution is of interest only because we make at least implicit reference to a logical equation, which is stated in a normative form, the cognitive substance of which is something like the belief that “all men are equal”—that is, their rights or claims or legitimate aspirations are equal in a logical sense. To those who are unaware of this logical equation, and to those who are neither supporters nor opponents of the norm based on it, the sociological information about actual equality/ inequality is quite useless. What matters is not information about degrees of equality as such, but the conclusions we can draw from it regarding the degree of conformity between sociological and logical equality. In this sense, it is its critical function which makes sociology interesting.

There was no need for sociology in feudal societies or during the transition from the feudal to liberal-capitalist social formations. What was needed was normative political theory, which leads, in the works of the eighteenth-century philosophers, to the establishment of the normative equation: each member of civil society is entitled to the same rights and freedoms as every other member of the community, citizen equals citizen. What was needed in order to establish equations of this kind was not sociological research, but normative-deductive reasoning and sophisticated speculation about the conditions under which such equality might materialize. Why was no sociology needed? Because in order to discover the contrast between the normative equation and actual inequality, one had, not to conduct empirical research, but only to look into the legal codes and statutes that regulated the privileges and hierarchies of feudal society. The conflict was one of norm versus norm, not norm versus fact, for inequality was itself institutionalized by explicit privilege. All the early liberal philosophers had to do was to argue that the realization of an alternative set of norms would lead to the greater happiness of the community. They did so by attacking the institutionalized and explicitly normative order of the old society and confronting it with the new liberal equation—an equation, of course, that was victorious only because it became the program and ideology of the ascending class of merchants and industrial capitalists. The basic schema of their social philosophy was to demonstrate that what deserves to be treated as equal was actually institutionalized as unequal. On the philosophical plane, the two sets of normative statements opposed each other.

Quite different from this model of critique is the way in which the radical critique of bourgeois society proceeds. Its modus operandi is the demonstration that, although the liberal equation has been institutionalized, granting free and equal access to the market and even free and equal access to the political process, the institutionalization of bourgeois freedom and equality has not, in fact, led to anything approach-
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Actual equality; it has, rather, produced and continually reproduces factual inequality on the largest scale. The difference between the two modes of critique is this: while the power of the aristocracy over peasants was institutionalized and sanctioned as part of the political order in feudal society, the power of the capitalist class over the working class is not only not institutionalized in bourgeois society but is even apparently neutralized by the institutional pattern of equal citizenship. How then can inequality emerge under the auspices of the institutionalized liberal equation? Any answer to this question must be sociological. It must leave the plane of a normative discourse, which challenged the legitimacy of the feudal order, and engage in the "subinstitutional" analysis of the facts and causal links among facts which lead, on the basis of institutionalized equality, to the inequality of classes and groups. The confrontation is no longer between one set of norms and another, but between norms and systematic causal theories of social life. The critical objection is no longer that what properly deserves (according to a normative theory) to be treated equally is treated unequally, but that what is strictly equal by institutionalized norms still turns out (according to causal processes established by sociological research) to be vastly unequal, in actual fact. The objects of the two models of critique are reciprocal. The philosophical tradition criticizes doctrines that help to institutionalize and defend inequality where equality should prevail. The sociological model of critique demonstrates that inequality prevails for systemic causes where economic and political equality are institutionalized. The one puts into question and challenges the false "hierarchization" of the equal; the other, the ideological equalization of those who in fact remain unequal. What the philosophers attacked were doctrines that treated equals as nonequal; the radical sociologists and political economists attack ideologies (such as liberal pluralism) that created the mere appearance of equality, where, in fact, vast inequalities persist. Social philosophy aims at the normative critique of institutionalized inequality; its historical place is the ascending bourgeois-capitalist social formation. Sociology aims at the empirical critique of institutionalized equality (of universal citizenship and market participation) and at a theoretical understanding of how such equality is perverted into actual inequality; its historical place is industrial capitalism.1

What this crude schematization of the history and political implications of social thought should be able to demonstrate is this: there are two categories of errors or mistakes that we can fall victims to as social scientists. One is to conceive of the equal as hierarchical—the mistake of the reactionary defenders of the old order; the other one is to conceptually equate the elements of what in fact remains a hierarchical structure—the business of the liberal ideologists. It is in both of these cases true that
mistaken logic, i.e., the muddling of identicalness and difference, turns not only into bad sociology but also into politics.

Although the first mistake has a longer history, it is hardly to be found less frequently than the second one. A familiar example is the conceptual distinction between blue-collar workers and white-collar workers. The problem here is not that sociologists take into account the many well-documented differences in character of work, lifestyle, political behavior, and attitudes that exist between the two groups. The problem is rather, that in doing so, many sociologists fail to take into account the possibility that (a) such differentiations within the working class as a whole may well be different responses to the identical situation of wage labor, and (b) that the underlying sameness of this situation becomes increasingly clearer under the impact of mechanization, de-skilling, and the increasing job insecurity that affects white as well as blue-collar workers. The criticism of such elliptical conceptualizations is that they are wholly concerned with the subjectivity of differences, while ignoring the equality of the objective conditions to which all wage workers are subject.

In our present context, the reverse mistake is of greater interest, namely the mistake of conceptually equating the unequal. An example is the juridical treatment of strikes and lockouts as "equivalent" and therefore equally legitimate measures of the supply and demand sides of the "labor market". Another example is the economic concept of the "labor market" itself—to the extent that it suggests the principal sameness (a) of markets (i.e., markets for goods and services and markets for labor) and (b) the equality of freedom of choice that "partners" in markets (i.e., agents on the supply and demand sides) enjoy in making contracts with one another. Such conceptual equations tend to de-emphasize, to say the very least, structural differences between labor power and any commodity, and the resulting asymmetry of power and freedom that emerges between the supply and demand sides as soon as labor power is allocated through markets, i.e., as soon as it is institutionally treated as if it were a commodity (while in fact it is not—because it cannot be physically separated from its "owner"; because it does not come into being due to the expectation of its salability; because it is of no use-value for its (propertyless) "owner"; and because its owner is therefore forced to enter into a wage contract). Such intellectual categorizations of the world correspond quite neatly to the real categorizations according to which social and economic life is organized, and they tend to neglect differences which are not recognized by the practice of capitalist social arrangements. Liberal social science does not perform its ideological (and thus political) function by normatively advocating certain policies, supporting established elites, or giving advice to the ruling class. Though it does all these things, too, they are contingent upon individuals acting within the system of science.
and do not constitute part of its intellectual structure. This intellectual structure itself performs an ideological and political function by committing either the "feudal" error of "false differentiation" and/or the "liberal" error of "false identity". Consequently, the intellectual practice of coding reality by the dramaturgic use of nonequations and equations is—and has always been—the object of criticism, not only of the Marxian tradition in social science, but also of all social scientists who do not want truth to be perverted by the positivistic standard of conformity to existing social arrangements.

It is in this spirit and on the basis of these epistemological premises that we want to examine the hidden difference that is ignored by the prevailing practice of "coding" social reality by employing the concept of "interest group" (or "organized interest"). Our argument will try to provide theoretical evidence for the proposition that, just as much as economic concepts (of market, commodity, freedom of contract, supply and demand, as they are applied to both capital and labor) tend to deny (and even to block the cognitive access to) the reality of class, the political science concept of interest group (as the outgrowth of some classunspecific "logic of collective action" and a neutral form that can be filled equally by heterogeneous "interests") performs the same function of obscuring the category of social class by the intellectual practice of equating the unequal. Again, the link between logical and sociological uses of "equality" is obvious—if, as interest-group theory suggests, the pure organizational form of organized interest representation is equally accessible (and in this sense logically equivalent) to the "groups" of capital, labor, and others, then there is no reason to assume that the use of this perfectly neutral instrumentality will result in anything like systemic asymmetry of wealth and power (i.e., social inequality). Charles Lindblom remarked in his recent book: "One of the conventional insensitivities of contemporary social science is revealed in scholarly works on interest groups. By some unthinking habit, many such works treat all interest groups as though on the same plane, and, in particular, they treat labor, business and farm groups as though operating at some parity with each other" (1977:193). Let us see what can be done about this "unthinking habit."

2. BEYOND THE "INTEREST GROUP" STEREOTYPE:
THE ASSOCIATIONAL PRACTICES OF LABOR AND CAPITAL

If one compares associations of business firms with labor unions solely with respect to properties of formal organization, there seem to be, at first glance, a number of similarities; these are normally used to define the concept of "interest groups", of which both types of organizations are